2025 will mark the 100th anniversary of Georges Delerue’s birth. Hosted by the University of Evry, this international conference pays tribute to one of the most prolific composers of French cinema, who won three César awards for his scores to Préparez vos mouchoirs (Bertrand Blier, 1978), L’Amour en fuite (François Truffaut, 1979) and Le Dernier Métro (Truffaut, 1980). Despite the existence of a few biographies, the musician is still little represented in academic literature. The conference aims to reflect on existing research on the composer and to lay new foundations for the study of his work.

Born on March 12, 1925, Delerue entered the Roubaix Conservatoire in 1939, where he studied clarinet, piano, and harmony with Francis Bousquet and then Alfred Desenclos in 1943. He was then admitted to the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, where he studied fugue with Simone Plé-Caussade and composition with Henri Büsser (succeeded by Darius Milhaud in 1947). His studies were endorsed by several honours, culminating in 1949 with a First Prize in composition and the first Second Prize of the Grand Prix de Rome. Delerue then devoted himself to directing and writing music for the stage, composing for radio and television (in particular advertisements), before directing recordings of film scores from 1952, such as those written by Pierre Barbaud and Jean Grémillon. He wrote several scores for short films; following his encounter with Pierre Kast, he wrote his first feature film score for Le Bel Âge (Kast, 1959).
Georges Delerue’s film career spans almost forty years, embracing most cinematic genres and the trends of his artistic era. An emblematic musician of the French “New Wave” since his collaborations with Agnès Varda (Du côté de la côte, 1958; Documenteur, 1981), Alain Resnais (Hiroshima mon amour, 1959), Jean-Luc Godard (Le Mépris, 1963) and above all François Truffaut (from Tirez sur le pianiste, 1960 to Vivement dimanche!, 1983), he also embodies French popular cinema in all its diversity. He has distinguished himself in thrillers (Georges Lautner, Claude Sautet, Jean-Pierre Melville, Alain Cavalier), dramas (Claude Berri, Yannick Bellon), comedies (Gérard Oury, Edouard Molinaro), adventure films (Henri Verneuil, Philippe de Broca), and historical frescoes (Chouans!, Philippe de Broca, 1987; La Révolution française, Robert Enrico and Richard T. Heffron, 1989). The composer has also worked on documentaries, notably with Jean Raynaud (Les Ingénieurs de la mer, 1952), Jacques-Yves Cousteau (Le Testament de l’île de Pâques, 1978; Le Nil, 1989) and Robert Pansard-Bresson (Tours du monde, tours du ciel, 1987).

Delerue also pursued an international career, particularly in British cinema, with dramas directed by Jack Clayton (four collaborations1) and historical films directed by Fred Zinnemann (A Man for All Seasons, 1966) and Charles Jarrott (Anne of the Thousand Days, 1969). Beginning in 1969 (A Walk With Love and Death, John Huston); the composer’s American turn gained strength when he moved to Los Angeles in 1980. He won the Oscar for Best Score for I Love You, je t’aime (George Roy Hill, 1979). The United States was a new home for Delerue, one where the composer would not face a lack of respect and recognition from his French peers (particularly in the avant-garde serial music scene2): “In France, when you’re doing film music, it’s hard, in the ‘noble’ music world, to have a good image because you’re in show business. That only exists in France. In Italy, England, or the United States, there is no such problem3.” Although he worked with American filmmakers such as Oliver Stone (Salvador, 1985; Platoon, 1986) and Mike Nichols (Dolphin’s Day, 1973; The Silkwood Mystery, 1983; Biloxi Blues, 1988), he was always keen to continue his work in French cinema at the same time. In the latter part of his career, this led to encounters with Diane Kurys (A Man in Love, 1986) and Pierre Schoendoerffer (Diên Bien Phu, 1992).

Following Maurice Jaubert’s footsteps and keen to preserve his independence from the Hollywood system, Delerue regularly claimed his allegiance to the French tradition of film music. Following Jaubert’s famous stance against Hollywood symphonic scores from the 1930s and 1940s, he criticized the large-scale audiovisual synchronism, musical illustrations, and any form of “redundancy” between the musical accompaniment and the images:

I had to [...] avoid what I didn’t like about American music, what I call the “musical tap” that covers a film from start to finish, as well as the pleonasm that is so often present. Violins that start sobbing as soon as you hear a lady cry, for example! It was all ridiculous4.

Delerue claimed to belong to the audiovisual “counterpoint school,” which encouraged “detachment” and “distancing from the image [...] in search of refinement5.” This counterpoint takes shape in his view when “music occurs at the moment when we can no longer say enough,

1 However, Delerue’s score for Something Wicked This Way Comes (Clayton, 1983) was rejected.
2 See in particular the previously unpublished audio interview with Georges Delerue conducted between May 4 and May 7, 1980, at the Cinémathèque of Luxembourg as part of “La semaine de la musique de film,” available on the composer’s official website (http://www.georges-delerue.com/fr/biographie/propos/interview.html).
4 Quoted in « Profession Musicien », Première, n° 25, 1979, p. 69.
either with text or image, to ‘express the inexpressible,’ as Debussy used to say.” This aesthetic stance marks a desire to distance himself from a hegemonic cultural model by asserting a French national specificity, and to propose other ways of using music for the screen — which would need to be identified and defined more precisely.

However, his prolific career is not limited to his work for the screen: the composer has also distinguished himself in the fields of opera (Le Chevalier de neige), incidental music (L’Alcade de Zalamea), ballet (Les Trois Mousquetaires) and "sound and light" shows (La Cinéscénie du Puy du Fou illustrating the history of Vendée, 1982-2002), and has written for radio (theme tune for the Radioscopie program created by Jacques Chancel) and television (historical TV films; television series Thibaud ou les Croisades by France Bennys and Henri Colpi, 1968; mini-series Jacquou le Croquant directed by Stellio Lorenzi in 1969 and Les Rois maudits by Claude Balma in 1972-1973). Lastly, his concert works include some thirty opuses divided more or less equally between orchestral music (concertante works and orchestral suites), choral music (Prières pour les temps de détresse, song cycles, etc.), and chamber music (string quartets, brass quintet, sonatas, etc.).

It is to this immense and abundant body of work, marked by tensions between artistic demands and commercial necessities, short forms and symphonic development, popular melodies and atonality, and songs and operatic vocality, that we wish to devote this conference-tribute. Proposals for papers should seek to highlight the main traits of Delerue’s work and his artistic collaborations, focusing on the following (non-exhaustive) topics:

- artistic duos: study of the tandem, permanent or more temporary, formed by Delerue with directors (of all nationalities);
- salient characteristics of Delerue’s compositional style and aesthetic approach (the search for the “beautiful melody,” a taste for Baroque language, a general rejection of synthesizers) situated in their context — music for concert, live performance, or screen arts;
- study of the “extra-filmic” and “filmic intramusicalities” of Delerue’s work;
- study of the singularity of Delerue’s writing in relation to the musical conventions of cinematographic genres and the history of music in French, American, and British cinemas;
- musical and audiovisual intertextualities: analysis of the use of Delerue’s music in other films, such as the famous theme of Camille from Le Mépris, used in Casino (Martin Scorsese, 1995), or the theme associated with Barbara and Julien from Vivement dimanche !, used in 2046 (Wong Kar Wai, 2004);
- study of Delerue’s compositions for radio and television;
- studies of Delerue’s concert and stage works;
- reception and legacy of Delerue’s music.

Proposals of no more than 400 words should be submitted to Chloé Huvet (chloe.huvet@univ-evry.fr) and Jérôme Rossi (jerome.rossi@univ-lyon2.fr) no later than September 30, 2024. Paper proposals must include a title, an abstract, and a short biography.

The languages accepted for the conference are French and English.

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Conference Committee
Céline Carenco, Université Lumière Lyon 2
Cécile Carayol, Université de Rouen Normandie
Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, Avignon Université
Chloé Huvet, Université d’Évry Paris-Saclay
Jérémy Michot, Université de Tours
Giùsy Pisano, École Nationale Supérieure Louis-Lumiére
Jérôme Rossi, Université Lumière Lyon 2
Inès Taillandier-Guittard, Université d’Évry Paris-Saclay

Selected References
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Gimello-Mesplomb, Frédéric, Georges Delerue, une vie, Hélèette, Jean Curutchet, 1998.